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South Sudan: A Fledgling Nation

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Abstract

The citizens of south Sudan are rejoicing in the hope of building a new nation after the referendum next year. They are hoping to finally gain independence from the north and thus create an independent and a prosperous south Sudan. However, prosperity of a nation depends on a number of factors which are conspicuously absent in the case of south Sudan. These include existence of a socially cohesive society and a basic social and economic infrastructure. A socially cohesive society is essential to pave the way for a genuine democracy, while the presence of basic infrastructure provides the institutional base to a nation to successfully operate independently. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the absence of these essential prerequisites for prosperity in south Sudan. The paper will focus on the tribal conflicts which are making a sham of democracy and, therefore, undermining the prospects of creation of a cohesive society. In addition, the paper will focus on the low levels of health care and education, food and water supplies and basic physical infrastructure and their impact on creating developmental disparities between the center (Juba) and the rural areas and the peripheral regions. These divisions have the potential of becoming fundamental roadblocks to the creation of a flourishing nation of south Sudan.

Introduction

After more than two decades of civil war, peace was finally reached in 2005 between the north and south Sudan through the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA). This peace accord, in addition to making power-sharing and wealth-sharing arrangements, stipulated a referendum for south Sudan in 2011. The referendum would determine the political status of south Sudan – whether it would remain a part of the greater Sudan or it would become an independent country. South Sudan, however, stands at a crossroads today. On the one hand, the citizens are preparing for the referendum next year and are rejoicing over the prospects of potential independence from the north. On the other hand, the people of south Sudan are struggling with the basic survival issues. Growing tribal conflicts and the inability of the government to control them explains the fragility and divisiveness of the society in south Sudan. In addition, the absence of basic infrastructure and low levels of economic development impedes the possibility of the creation of a robust nation and threatens to deepen the wedge between the center and the peripheral regions.

Tribal Conflicts: Absence of a Genuine Democracy

South Sudan has been marred by tribal conflicts, more particularly, in the years after the signing of the CPA. These conflicts have limited the prospects of the creation of an integrated nation. The issue of tribal animosity in the south is an upshot of the colonial rule in Sudan (1899-1956). The colonialists, in an effort to pursue their policy of divide and rule, limited the spread of Islam in the south and encouraged the southerners to follow their traditional religions and customs. In the process, the British not only restricted the influence of Islamic customs and the laws in the south, they also discouraged the southern societies from borrowing their neighbor's customs (Douglas 2007: 13). This intensified the divisions within the southern communities resulting in the creation of an “anthropological zoo” in the south (Collins 2008: 42). This “anthropological zoo” is in deep disarray today.

The major ethnic communities, Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Murle, along with the 40 others, whose divisions were deeply entrenched during the colonial rule, are in constant conflict with each other. The economic disparities between these communities have further fuelled the conflict.

Dominant tribes have been fighting to maintain their power through appropriation and control of the depleting resources, especially land and water, while the others are fighting for their own fair share of these resources. The inevitable outcome, either way, has been violence and struggle. In more than 100 tribal conflicts in the year 2009 alone, close to 400,000 people have been displaced and hundred others have been killed.

These inter-tribal conflicts and, hence, the divisions within the society have become even more entrenched since the time CPA declared south Sudan to be a semi-autonomous region with independent legislative, executive and judicial branches. The ensuing struggle for power, between different ethnic communities, resulted in politics being dampened by violence and rule of law being compromised. Ever since the signing of the CPA, south Sudan has been ruled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). The ethnicity of the SPLM and its army wing Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) is primarily Dinka. Therefore, Dinka, which is also the largest ethnic tribe in south Sudan, has very frequently been accused by the other tribes of spearheading south Sudan's politics in its favor. The post-election violence (elections were held in April of 2010) in the states of Jonglei, Unity, and Northern Bahr el Ghazal explains the growing despair against the Dinka dominance and the dominance of SPLM/SPLA. The ruling SPLM has also been accused of fraud and rigging of elections. Free and fair elections being the foundational core of a successful democracy, the democratic environment in south Sudan has thus become less than conducive.

There is indeed merit in the desire of the southerners to achieve independence from the north considering the fact that they have been treated as second class citizens by Khartoum ever since independence. However, there is no dearth of examples of states in Africa which have fallen apart after the initial euphoria of unity and victory against a common enemy. Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola are a few examples of African states where people from different ethnic backgrounds stood side by side to fight against their respective colonizers. But after the colonizers left, these states experienced violence and chaos related to power struggle between different ethnic communities.

Considering the fact that south Sudan is home to a number of ethnic tribes which have been in constant conflict with each other, a socially cohesive society in south Sudan can only be built with the consolidation of the basic democratic institutions and with political consensus. In order for south Sudan to emerge as a stable and a strong nation, therefore, the new government will have to make a concerted effort to unite the country and provide legitimacy to its governance. It is pertinent here to refer to the example of Mozambique. Mozambique, located in Southern Africa, reeled in conflict for more than a decade after independence till the signing of the peace agreement in 1992. In order to end the sufferings of the people of Mozambique, the rival factions, Frelimo and Renamo, cooperated to secure peace and end the war. They also adopted an Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA) which resulted not only in economic growth but also in the consolidation of a democratic polity based on political consensus. Mozambique has experienced apparent growth and stability ever since.

Absence of the Basic Infrastructure: Developmental Disparities between the Center (Juba) and the Rural and the Peripheral Regions

South Sudan is perhaps one of the least developed and the poorest regions in the world. Despite its natural resources, more than 90% of the population lives on less than a dollar a day (Grande 2009). Basic infrastructure, which is integral to the development and growth of a nation, is also minimal in south Sudan. Absence of basic infrastructure has added to the poverty and misery of the people in the region.

Health Care and Education

Health care and educational facilities in south Sudan were destroyed during the 22 year old civil war between the north and the south (1983-2005). Even after the signing of the peace agreement these services have not been developed and are still in their infancy. All major efforts towards revamping them have been undertaken by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Government of South Sudan (GoSS), created after the CPA, has not been actively involved in providing for the basic health and education needs of its people. The ruling SPLM has remained occupied with the power struggle in the region rather than focusing on the developmental needs of its people. The success of the NGOs too has been limited primarily due to their limited numbers. According to Lise Grande,

“There is a need for an estimated 10 NGOs per state to support the humanitarian operation yet there are on an average only two per state” (Grande 2009)

The NGOs have not been able to make a difference at the grassroots level because of the inaccessibility of the rural areas due to the dilapidated condition of the roads and an unreliable transport system. Also, the operations of the NGOs have weakened due to their dependence on the financial contributions from the voluntary donors who often tend to be unpredictable. Therefore, in the absence of commitment and accountability on the part of the GoSS and due to the heavy dependence on the NGOs, south Sudan has not been able to meet the lofty goals of development which would put it on the road to becoming a self-reliant independent nation with a robust and educated labor force.

As a result, south Sudan today has one of the lowest health and education indicators in the world. Maternal mortality rate is the highest in the world and child immunization rate is the lowest (Grande 2009). Infant mortality in south Sudan is 150 per thousand live births and “under-5 mortality” is 250 per thousand live births (Save the Children 2010). Also, south Sudan currently has the second lowest access to primary education in the world, ahead of only Afghanistan (Hope for Ariang 2008). Only 25% of the children in southern Sudan are enrolled in school and less than 1% of the girls complete primary school (Hope for Ariang 2008). There are a few primary schools, most of them operating under trees, and even fewer secondary schools.

However, the worst indicators are in the rural areas and in the peripheral regions. The primary and secondary schools in these areas are ill-equipped due to insufficient assistance from the government in Juba. Teachers in the schools in the rural areas and the peripheral regions go without salaries for months and operate in run-down buildings without proper teaching materials. Likewise, the medical centers in these regions lack basic supplies and trained medical personnel. The hospitals do not have ambulances for the patients and they operate without sufficient medical equipment in the absence of any kind of budgetary assistance from Juba. Dr Thomas Akim, Medical Director of Juba Teaching Hospital candidly stated

“Like roads, health provisions extend little beyond Juba.....there are health centers but they are not equipped to give services. There will be no one there and medicines of course are short” (Akim 2009)

Food and Water

The United Nations has declared south Sudan as the home of some of the hungriest places on earth with 15 % of the population being severely malnourished. Approximately, 45% of the children in south Sudan suffer from physical stunting resulting from malnutrition (Save the Children 2010). The Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM), which is used to measure malnutrition by international organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Food Program (WFP), is high in all the states in southern Sudan except Central Equatoria. GAM measures the weight for the respective height of the children under five. GAM measure of 15% is used as the cut-off to provide for the nutrition emergencies and feeding programs by the WHO and WFP respectively. Central Equatoria is the only state in south Sudan where GAM is below 10%. Capital Juba is located in Central Equatoria State. The GoSS recently promised a \$38 million initiative to fight food shortages in different regions. But considering the fact that in the past GoSS has been largely inefficient in handling the situation and has repeatedly blamed the internal conflicts and the drought conditions for the hunger, the fruition of any such endeavors remains doubtful. In addition, nearly 70% of the population in south Sudan, concentrated primarily in the rural areas, does not have access to clean water. This has resulted in the growth of infectious diseases and has contributed to a high mortality rate. According to Lise Grande,

“Some of the deadliest diseases in the world are prevalent in south Sudan, including cholera, meningitis, rift valley fever and guinea worm” (Grand 2009)

A number of NGOs like Cooperative Housing Foundation (CHF) International, Hope International Development Agency and Population Services International (PSI,) have sponsored safe drinking water projects in south Sudan. But these have been able to make only limited impact in limited areas due to their operational and infrastructural limitations, as discussed above. On the other side, the GoSS is actively getting involved in establishing water projects in Juba.

The first drinking water factory, the Yang-Yom water factory, was established in Juba in 2008 with the support of southern Sudan ministry of commerce, trade and supply. The USAID launched an urban water project in 2010, in collaboration with GoSS, to supply Juba residents with clean drinking water. Although Juba still has to go a long way to fulfill its clean water supply demand but most efforts by the GoSS in this regard have remained concentrated in the capital city.

Physical Infrastructure

Physical infrastructure, including transport and communications, which is essential for initiating sustained development, is also minimal in south Sudan (Bure 2007: 93). Road network was never developed in south Sudan during the colonial period and after independence. The GoSS has also not undertaken any major schemes to build a proper road network. The entire south Sudan has only 50km of all-weather tarmac road which restricts development and development ventures in the region. Rural development particularly gets affected due to the lack of reliable and economic means of personal and goods transport in rural areas (Bure 2007: 93). With majority of the population in south Sudan residing in the rural areas, rural development becomes very important. Although the telecommunication industry has shown some signs of progress with the investing of the foreign firms in the region, the industry still remains in its infancy and is also centered in the major towns because of the lack of the basic infrastructure-proper roads and transport in the rural areas.

The GoSS is dependent on the international institutions and aid agencies for the investment, training and operation of all of its infrastructural and development projects. The government is, therefore, working with the World Bank towards streamlining the economic policies to facilitate public and private investment to foster development. It is also developing financial systems and planning processes from scratch with the support from the UN, World Bank and other donors (Joint NGO Briefing Paper 2010: 25). The pace of this technical assistance, though, is very slow and has resulted in slightly greater economic activity in the capital Juba only (Joint NGO Briefing Paper 2010: 25). The peripheral regions and the rural areas still remain untouched.

Juba and the Periphery

The disparities between Juba and the rest of the regions, as described above, have the potential of becoming a major impediment to the creation of a thriving south Sudan. In the past, the southerners have blamed the government in Khartoum for neglecting the political and economic development of its peripheral regions. Ironically though, the future threat that exists for south Sudan, after independence, is that the role played by Khartoum would be replaced by Juba, the capital of south Sudan. Ever since the GoSS has assumed autonomous power in south Sudan, after the signing of CPA, whatever meager development has occurred, it has remained focused in Juba, with the periphery and its masses having been left underdeveloped and also underrepresented. In the past few years, there has been a lot of euphoria in the capital city of Juba, as being one of the fastest growing cities in Africa. Juba is also claimed to have become the hot spot favorite of the investors from Africa and abroad in the recent years. A landmark effort that is earning kudos for GoSS is the \$ 10 billion housing project which will be undertaken through public and private sector investment partnership. The project aims to provide housing facilities to the citizens of 14 major cities in south Sudan including Juba. This is in contrast with the stark reality of hundreds and thousands of others living in make shift or temporary arrangements in the peripheral regions and in the rural areas of south Sudan. However, the question is whether these developmental efforts will translate into broader development and growth, considering the fact that trickle-down economics has not worked for the African nations in the past. The creation of a unified state of south Sudan requires that the government should undertake the responsibility of providing for the basic necessities and development of the masses, irrespective of their ethnicity and region. The GoSS will have to take a bottom up approach as far as development is concerned to ensure peace and security and also to ensure the economic health of the whole nation. In this respect, the success of Botswana, after its independence (1966), in the sub-Saharan Africa speaks volumes about the effectiveness of an accountable state. Bauer and Taylor attribute this success to

“the establishment of a solvent state that delivered public goods (roads, schools, watering facilities, clinics, etc) on a non tribal and non regional basis” (Bauer and Taylor 2005: 92-93)

The growth chart of south Sudan, however, has remained checkered.

Even five years after the signing of the CPA, which agreed upon financial benefits for the south through the revenue sharing and wealth sharing arrangements (50% of the oil money, division of tax collection), development and growth in the south has remained sluggish. Although the government in Khartoum is largely held responsible for not delivering its promise, the GoSS is also repeatedly charged of lacking legitimacy and neglecting the needs of its people. South Sudan has a great potential in terms of availability of natural resources, vast arable agricultural lands and long standing trade relations with the neighboring states. In order to translate this potential into success it will have to adopt a different model. This would mean a broad-based and an all-inclusive developmental approach seeking to avoid the tribal conflicts resulting from the competition for the depleting resources. It would also mean bridging the divisions between the center and the peripheral regions including the division between Juba and the rural areas which could become a potential source of conflict in the independent south Sudan.

Conclusion

After the signing of the CPA in 2005, south Sudan gained autonomy from the north. After the referendum next year, south Sudan will likely gain its independence from the north. South Sudan has had an autonomous democratic government since 2005 and probably it will have a sovereign and an independent government after the referendum. However, what south Sudan has not had in the past five years, and, therefore, runs the risk of not having in the future, is an accountable government working towards social cohesion through power sharing, to establish a genuine democracy, and through wealth sharing, to foster broader development at the grassroots levels. As far as power sharing is concerned, the ruling SPLM seems to have no intent of sharing power with the rest of the community in the independent south Sudan considering the fact that the government forces have been implicated of using violence and fraud in the recent elections in April 2010. South Sudan can emerge as a successful and a secure nation only if the government ensures a broad based participatory politics and gives a fair share to the other ethnic communities in the ruling. Peace was established in Mozambique in 1992 after 15 years of civil war (1977-1992) when a new constitution was written which enshrined the “principles of liberal, multi-party democracy” (Manning 2002: 40).

In addition, wealth sharing continues to be an issue of major concern in south Sudan. With all the major developmental and infrastructural projects being centered in Juba and a few other major towns, the likelihood of a widespread and a comprehensive development of all the regions seems less plausible. The new independent state of south Sudan will have to assume the ownership of ushering in pervasive development to ensure the growth of all the regions. State’s like Botswana in southern Africa achieved economic success after independence primarily with the establishment of “a neutral and non-ethnic state and with the adoption of a state-sponsored and state-directed developmental approach” (Bauer and Taylor 2005: 92-93).

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